

OCOTILLO WELLS DISTRICT

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Blowsand Reader

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Familiar Faces and New Places!

By Garratt Aitchison, District Superintendent

We are about half way through another amazing riding season. The Halloween kick-off, Thanksgiving, and the ever-popular New Year's holiday were a time for family and friends to ride and explore. Thousands of visitors lined the 78 and 86 in their motor homes, toy haulers, and Jeeps as they navigated their way to the family's favorite camping spot—likely a spot in the desert that holds memories for more than one generation. I see the excitement in the staff, as well. Several have returned for their fifth or sixth season while others are experiencing their first. It's a team effort, across all program areas, that helps ensure your park is ready for your arrival. As you ride, explore, and have a blast, we ask that you do so responsibly. Please respect the resources and one another.

Director Mangat recently announced the finalization of our Department's statewide reorganization. During this lengthy process that included staff input, public meetings, and stakeholder outreach, all of the Department's 280 park units, as well as headquarters operations, were examined. The goal was to determine the most efficient model that delivers the highest level of service to the field and the visitor. What does this mean for the Ocotillo Wells District? As a result, Ocotillo Wells District will grow in size by three park units. We are pleased to have Salton Sea and Picacho State Recreation Areas, as well as Indio Hills Palms, join the Ocotillo Wells District. Although these units will remain part of the Colorado Desert District until July 1, 2018, we will be working closely with park staff in those units, as well as stakeholder groups, to ensure a smooth transition. Please join me in welcoming them.



Slab City Donations

By Garratt Aitchison, District Superintendent, and Karen Peña, Office Technician

Each year during the holiday season, the Ocotillo Wells District staff puts together some sort of drive to help a family, group, or organization in need. This year, it was unanimous that we would help out families in the community known as Slab City. This was our second season visiting this community. Last year, the administrative staff delivered several boxes of canned foods that had been collected from park staff.

California State Park Employee Wanda Freeman was so moved by the experience that she quickly nominated this community once again to be this year's recipient. Although the canned foods were graciously and anxiously accepted, Wanda noticed that other items like pillows, blankets and sheets were also needed. As a result of the generosity of the district employees, Wanda and her team hit the road to deliver two loads of pillows, blankets, diapers, and pies.

Slab City, also called "The Slabs," is largely a snowbird community located in the Sonoran Desert in Imperial County. The settlement is located 156 miles northeast of San Diego and is also used by recreational vehicle owners and squatters from across North America. It took its name from concrete slabs that remained from the abandoned World War II Marine Corps barracks of Camp Dunlap.



Employees Wanda Freeman, Cheryll Schulz, Karen Peña, Kitty Gravett, and Melony Light pack donations

Several thousand campers, many of them retired, use the site during the winter months. The "snowbirds" stay only for the winter before migrating north in spring to cooler climates. The temperatures during summer are unforgiving—as high as 120°F. Nonetheless, there is a group of around 150 permanent residents who

live in The Slabs year round. Some of these "Slabbers" derive their living from government programs and have been driven to The Slabs by poverty. Others have moved to The Slabs to learn how to live off the grid and be left alone. Still others have moved there to stretch their retirement income.

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Slab City Donations *continued...*

In 1961 the Department of Defense filed a quitclaim deed that conveyed the site to the State of California. There are no rules; no charge for parking; and no official electricity, running water, sewers, toilets or trash pickup service. Many residents use generators or solar panels to generate electricity. The closest community with proper law enforcement is approximately four miles southwest of Slab City in Niland, where the residents often go to do basic shopping.

This last Thanksgiving holiday, Ocotillo Wells SVRA Administrative Staff joined Ernie and Debbie Loza's Slab City Ministry and their volunteers to deliver food, pie, water, clothes and donated essentials to the people living in Slab City. The recipients were extremely grateful. Thank you to all the employees who helped and donated clothes, blankets and money to purchase the pies. Your generosity allowed us to be part of the Lozas' ministry of love and grace. Your kindness blessed the families of our neighboring community.



Halloween Spooktacular

By Jan Naragon, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation & Education

“They were he-ee-eere!” Third Halloween Spooktacular Is In the Can!

Hollywood didn’t have anything on Howling Meg Circle in Ocotillo Wells SVRA on the nearly moonless evening of October 28. Wacky characters, superheroes and heroines, ghouls, princesses, monsters, and other minor celebrities appeared at nightfall to go trick-or-treating, play games, and generally strut their stuff. A sugar haze formed above the Circle as families added candy to already monstrous stashes—enough for years of zombie consumption. Word has it that a flash-mob dance scene erupted and disappeared as mysteriously as it appeared.

Then things got serious. Interpretation staff hosted two reality shows, OW style—breathtaking bats and scorpion safari. Our resident animal stars did not disappoint. Visitors shared great photos of glowing scorpions at the Amphitheater. On the Discovery Center deck, they learned bat chit-chat after watching and listening to the only mammals capable of true flight.



Not scary enough? More than 500 people lived to tell the gruesome tale of the Haunted Trail, which rivaled Alfred Hitchcock’s finest thrillers. Blood-curdling screams were traced to the ruins of poor Dead Edgar, especially the dreaded Bucket #9. Those who didn’t dare risk anything more spine-chilling were busy making seasonal crafts in the Discovery Center classroom. Of course, all were welcome for s’mores and lemonade around a campfire, courtesy of Friends of Ocotillo Wells.

By all accounts, this Spooktacular was bigger and better than ever. In fact, glitterati are already whispering about next year’s sequel, *Spooktacular IV!* Same bat time, same bat channel.



Interpretive staff had incredible support this year from OW staff in other departments and from several dozen volunteers. Special thanks to Peter Ostroskie from Twin Cities! We couldn’t have done it without you! Thank you!

Annual Director's Awards for 2015 and 2016

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2015 and 2016 Director's Awards! Awardees were honored for their outstanding achievements, heroism, selflessness and personal dedication on January 18 during a ceremony at the California State Railroad Museum.

The **Special Act or Service Awards** recognizes employees who have performed an extraordinary act of heroism extending far above the normal call of duty or service.



Adam Borello, Jason Fincher, Mike Dippel, Sasha Wessitch, Callan McLaughlin, Andrew Ahlberg, and Steve Bier were among the current or former Ocotillo Wells' employees who were presented with the Special Act or Service Award at the Director's Award ceremony.

Jason Fincher now works for the BLM in the Palm Springs area

To the right are current and former Ocotillo Wells' Peace Officers or Desert Lifeguards who were present for the ceremony. Many of those pictured were award recipients



A SCALY DESERT

By Diana Fong, Environmental Services Intern

When thinking of the desert, people often believe conditions can be so harsh that no animal could survive. However, there are several species that call the desert home. Reptiles are a group that thrive in the desert. Often times, they can be seen trotting or slithering about or basking on an open rock soaking in the hot desert sun. If conditions are too cold or too hot, they seek shelter under bushes and rocks or go underground.



Above is a juvenile spotted-leaf nosed snake. These snakes are active at night and can grow up to 1.5 feet long. To the right is a young whiptail lizard. These lizards are born with a bright blue tail that eventually fades in color as they grow older. Below is a juvenile desert iguana. These lizards can withstand heat up to 115°F and mainly eat vegetation.



The Ocotillo Wells Resources team conducts bi-annual mark-recapture surveys using pitfall traps throughout the park to see what reptiles roam the lands. This summer, the Resources team caught 41 different individuals. Common reptiles found include common side-blotch lizard, whiptail lizard, zebra-tail lizard, desert iguana, flat-tailed horned lizard, shovel-nosed snake, spotted leaf-nosed snake, desert banded gecko, and sidewinders.



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A SCALY DESERT *continued...*



Above are desert banded geckos which roam the land in the night searching for small insects to eat. These nocturnal creatures can come in a few pattern variations from splotchy (right), splotchy and banded (left), and banded (not shown).



Two variations of shovel-nosed snake are shown above. These small snakes are known to be banded with colors of red, black, and white/cream but they can also be found without red. As their name suggests, these snakes are great diggers and often burrow into the sand.



The Colorado Desert sidewinder is the only venomous snake found in Ocotillo Wells SVRA. The “horns” above their eyes and rattle on their tail are distinct characteristics of these snakes. True

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A SCALY DESERT *continued...*

to their name, these snakes move in a sidewinding motion. If you encounter one, keep a safe distance away and do not engage or provoke this snake as its bite can be lethal.



Zebra-tailed lizards are quick and often run away before you notice they were even there. Their long legs help them run at high speeds to get away from predators. The black crossbars on the underside of their tail give them their name zebra-tailed. They often flip their tails up as they run away, or slowly wag it as a distraction when feeling threatened. During the breeding season, these lizards develop colors along their sides and belly. Males have dark bars and develop a blue-green color (left) while females lack or have faint bars and develop orange and yellow colors (right).



Colorado desert fringe-toed lizards are not often found in pitfall surveys but are a species of note. They are only found where there is sand. Their speckled pattern help them camouflage into the landscape making them difficult to find. As their name states they have fringe scales on their toes

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A SCALY DESERT *continued...*

which help these lizards run quickly across the sand. They have a bar and a permanent orange or pinkish stripe on each side of their belly. Colorado desert fringe-toed lizards are listed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as a species of special concern.



Flat-tailed horned lizards are shaped differently than most other lizards in the area. These lizards are often flat with rounded bodies and horns that stick out from behind their head. Unlike other horned lizards, individuals of this species, like the name states, have flat tails. Their colors and pattern allow them to blend well with their habitat making

them easy to miss. They are often found on rocks basking to warm up their bodies. They predominantly eat ants, especially harvester ants. When feeling threatened, these lizards will go into “rock pose” or bury themselves in the sand. Flat-tailed horned lizards are listed by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as a species of special concern.



2017 Desert Lifeguard Training Weekend

By Cole Magro, Desert Lifeguard



On October 5th through 7th, Ocotillo Wells hosted the fourth annual Desert Lifeguard training. During the training weekend, lifeguards who work at Ocotillo Wells SVRA, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, and Picacho State Recreation Area met to train on specific skills needed for the incidents that occur in the desert. Desert Lifeguards respond to a variety of emergencies that range from search and rescues to severe trauma resulting from traffic collisions. This year, highly-trained EMS staff from the Training Section of State Parks attended the training to assist on focused skills needed for the calls for service in the desert environment.

Training included proper radio communication, proper unit maintenance, advanced Emergency Medical skills, working with air ambulances, and team work. The training emphasized a lifeguard's ability to communicate, comprehend, and react in a proper, helpful manner. On Saturday and Sunday the training focused on Emergency Medical Responder skills. Those skills were put



into action on Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon with actors who played patients, EMR instructors as proctors, Rangers and Lifeguards as first responders. On Sunday, a much higher-scale scenario took place where Lifeguards and Rangers responded to a Multi-Casualty Incident. The response consisted of multiple Rangers and Lifeguards along with medical helicopters—Reach and Mercy Air.

(Continued on next page...)

2017 Desert Lifeguard Training Weekend *continued...*

This incident provided new Lifeguards and Rangers with different aspects to consider when responding to a call with these or similar circumstances.

The goal of the training is to prepare new Lifeguards for common situations that we face as Desert Lifeguards in Ocotillo Wells. A wise Ranger once said, "We take the best of the best and make them better."



Super Bowl Sunday Thank You Letter

By Adam Borello, State Park Police Officer Supervisor

I received a phone call from the mother of two boys who had collided with each other a couple years ago and sustained significant injuries. The mother wanted to express her gratitude for our staff's efforts in rendering medical aid and facilitating her two son's transports to medical facilities. Below is a copy of her correspondence. This letter has been edited for clarity.

Aug. 4, 2017

Dear Adam,

I am sorry it has taken me some time to finish this story of our two sons; it appears it is still a little hard to comprehend at moments. I really enjoyed our conversation and my husband and I are so very thankful for the services the Rangers provided at the scene of the accident. This is where our story begins.

A little history about our family.

Sean has been going to Ocotillo Wells since he was a child (almost 40 years). He feels like it is his second home, his backyard; he knows this desert like the back of his hand (this plays a huge roll in "his location" description in the emergency). Of course, with this being Sean's passion and enjoyment, it's only natural for our three boys to fall in love with riding in the desert as well. They were infants when we brought them along and so this became a place of fun for them also. We are very systematic; we go to the same place to camp every time, even our day rides; we would set up at the same spot, away from everyone. The kids know this area extremely well. The boys grew up with respect for the bikes and others around us; you never know what others' knowledge might be, so you have to stay vigilant at all times. The boys and Sean ride in full gear: jersey (not a t-shirt) and riding pants (not jeans), helmet, chest protector, boots, gloves, goggles, knee and shin guards. The only thing they didn't have is a neck brace and kidney belt.

This story would have a different ending if they were not wearing full gear, per the conversations with the doctors.

The accident: February 7, 2016, noon.

After the boys ate lunch, they both went for a quick ride around camp. Sean was getting ready to hop on his bike also. Cameron was on a straight trail to the right of camp; Jesse went to the left of camp to practice a small jump. Jesse, who at the time was 14 and had to be going at least 45-50 mph to clear the jump, hit the jump as Cameron was going on the trail perpendicular, headed towards the landing of Jesse's jump. He saw Jesse in the air and knew Jesse's landing would immediately hit him, and in that split second, he did. Jesse does not remember the ride at all; he only remembers eating lunch.

Mind you, this was Super Bowl Sunday and there was not a soul in sight. Sean did not witness the accident, but within seconds came up on the scene and saw his sons sprawled out and their bikes a strew. He thought, "this is not a funny joke guys," because in his mind, there is no way they hit each other; this can't be happening. He threw his bike down, ran over to Cameron and saw blood coming from his nose. He woke him and Cameron said he was "just resting." Sean ran to Jesse and noticed blood coming from his nose and ears; he was not responding and gurgling.

(Continued on next page...)

Super Bowl Sunday Thank You Letter *continued...*

Sean rode back to camp, just a few hundred feet, and called 911 (our phones usually do not have service). He threw all of the stuff in the back of the trailer, including his bike, and drove to the scene all while on 911. During this time, a couple was on a hill and saw the commotion and rode down to help him. This is where we are not sure of all of the events because of PTSD and the emotional trauma; the memory is hazy from just being frantic. The couple only knew Spanish, but the man spotted a Ranger passing the accident. He went to retrieve the Ranger and bring him back to Sean, while the lady was rubbing Sean's back trying to comfort and console him (bless their sweet hearts and a huge "Thank you" if we could ever find them)! Sean stabilized Jesse; Cameron was coherent, in and out, and injured.

Rangers are there, and two ambulances arrive. The kids are in the ambulances, and Sean hears them call off the ground transport, and hears Life Flight being called for both kids.

One helicopter for each kid being transported to two different hospitals. Jesse was on his way to Rady Children's Hospital in San Diego, and Cameron was flown to Palomar in Escondido.

While Sean was driving the trailer to the scene, the trailer came off the hitch of the truck; he lifted it back on
Not sure if the guy who came up on the scene helped him?

*** Also while driving to Rady, a trailer tire popped, but he continued to Rady***

Hospital:

Jesse was admitted into ICU with severe Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), a collapsed left lung, a grade 4-5 liver laceration, 6 brain bleeds, intubated for breathing, in a medically-induced coma, and scrapes and bruises. Cameron was admitted into Palomar with a broken Orbital (bone underneath eye), 2 brain bleeds, and a month later, we found out he broke his leg in two places - the tibia and distal femur. (Palomar only did an X-ray not CAT scan or MRI for his excruciating leg pain.)

Cameron came home three days after the accident.

Jesse was in ICU for two weeks, and rehab for three weeks. He spent a total of 5 weeks at Rady Children's Hospital. They both are doing very well.

The simple words of "Thank You" do not seem to fulfill how our hearts feel; those words seem very minimal. We are so very grateful to every single person who helped our boys. It was instrumental in saving their lives. What an amazing team Ocotillo Wells has, and the emergency staff!!

Dawson
Fedele

Magro
Ewart

Claar
Fincher

THANK YOU from the bottom of our hearts.

Meet Danielle ...

Hello, my name is Danielle Jackson, and I am working with the Interpretation team. I grew up in the San Luis Obispo County area, and just recently graduated from Cal State Fullerton studying geology. Over this past summer I did a Geoscientists-In-the-Parks internship at Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument in southern Idaho, working as a geology education intern. I look forward to my season here at OW, and am excited to further my passion for geoscience education here as a Senior Park Aide!



Meet Seher ...

Hello! My name is Seher Khan, and I am excited to be serving as a Senior Park Aide with the Interpretation team this season. After studying Park Management at West Valley College in Saratoga, CA, and Environmental Management at Humboldt State University, I began my seasonal work adventure. So far, I have been lucky enough to work in Alaska at the Mendenhall Glacier, in California's redwoods, on the Green River, and on the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail. I am a climber, backpacker, and native plant nerd. I moved here with my partner (Bryce) and an enormous white husky (Eifa). If you see us around, please say hello!



Meet Logan ...

My name is Logan Poe, and I am from Bryce Canyon NP. I am a naturalist and practiced amateur astronomer. I have been interpreting astronomy for over 9 years, since the age of 13. I have traveled all over the western U.S. providing astronomy interpretation and telescopes for night sky festivals at different National Parks. I have raised Great Danes all my life and I enjoy meeting new dogs. I love the outdoors and often go on adventures like canoeing, backpacking, and skiing. I am really excited to share the beautiful night sky of Ocotillo Wells with you!



Meet Holly ...

Hi, my name is Holly Lawson. I've been married for 33 years to my soul mate, Duke; we have three grown children. I started working for State Parks in October of 2007 as a Park Aide in Borrego Palm Canyon Campground. At the end of my season, I requested to help Maintenance, so I went to Cuyamaca State Park. I was hired back for my second season in Palm Canyon, and quickly moved up to an ATW Senior Park Aide. I always requested to help Maintenance during the summer season, where I worked at both Idyllwild and Palomar. In 2013 I transferred to the Salton Sea SRA as a Senior Maintenance Aide. I was there a season and a half before returning to ABDSP in Maintenance. In August of 2017 I began my new journey in Ocotillo Wells, where I am now a PMA and loving the new environment and people I'm working with. My hobbies are gardening, riding my horse, Rocker, hiking, swimming, traveling, and going to antique tractor shows and driving various Caterpillar tractors in parades.



Meet Doug ...

Hi, my name is Douglas Irons. I am a local from Ocotillo Wells, and have been living here for 22 years. I decided to start working for the Park because it's close to home (I could crawl backwards there). My hobbies are drinking beer and playing video games. My mother works for the State and gives you your paycheck. The Trails team welcomes Doug.



Meet Nick ...

Hello my name is Nick Kenne. I am from San Diego, but have lived in the desert for the past couple of years. I was interested in working for the Park because I know a few friends and family members who also work at the Park. I am interested in being outdoors and observing animals and bugs. Working with the Trails team provides Nick with this opportunity.



Trails News

By Brian Woodson, Park Maintenance Chief I

One of the many challenges that the Trails team faces each year is the repairing of park structures from natural or man-made causes...and fencing is not the least among them. Pictured here, several members of the Trails team work together to make some repairs to a protected water source over in Eriogonum Wash.



Ramiro Mandujano holds a peeler core log steady while Carlos Gales uses a small chainsaw to cut the end to the right length.



Doug Irons (foreground) uses a small sledgehammer to pound the rebar "pins" into place to secure the top rail to the posts. Behind him, Ryan Walasek uses a digging bar to pound the soil around each post to help secure it into the ground. The rest of the crew readies another section and poises to move in to assist as needed.



Doug (foreground) looks on while Shalena uses a gas-powered drill to prep a top rail for final fastening to the posts. Meanwhile the crew ahead of them continues on...

Trails News *continued...*

As with most season openings, the trail crew was out in force getting the park ready for the 2017 winter desert riding season. Pictured here, Senior Maintenance Aide Allison Boyle (right), assists one of our new staffers, Shalena Rogers, Maintenance Aide, with the installation of some replacement way finder marker signs. These Carsonite® markers are located approximately every 1/10th of a mile on all of the trails in Ocotillo Wells and serve to guide our visitors through the land as they recreate on myriad off-highway vehicles. Visible by day and night, these somewhat stalwart sentinels alert each visitor to which trail they are on, as well as to where along the trail they are located (the crew is in the process of adding mileage markings to each post), which definitely helps in emergency situations.



Meet Lucas...

Hi my name is Lucas Rodriguez. I've lived in Ocotillo Wells for 20 years. My hobbies are working out and hanging out with friends. My uncle works for the State as well and got me into the Trails Department.



Meet Shalena...

Hi, my name is Shalena Rogers. I've been coming to OW my entire life. I enjoy taking my Jeep XJ on the trails here and at Glamis. For the last six years, I have lived in Salton City, CA with my two sons. I look forward to making new friends and memories working at OWSVRA with the Trails team.



Old Building Gets New Life at OW

By Brian Woodson, Park Maintenance Chief I

On Friday, October 27, 2017, the old Heber office building finally made its way up to its new home here at Ocotillo Wells. Installed just to the south of the Discovery Center, this old building will see new life as a meeting area, place for the ranger staff to practice their defensive tactics, kid's programs, etc.

The eight-year-old building will have utilities reconnected, and a new front deck, ramp and sidewalk will be built up as time, money and staffing allows. It will be fully accessible once the project is completed.



Both halves of the building sit in queue while Maintenance Chief Brian Woodson and the lead contractor discuss final directions to get the building halves set in their resting places.



First half is placed fairly close to the limiting lines established for the project.

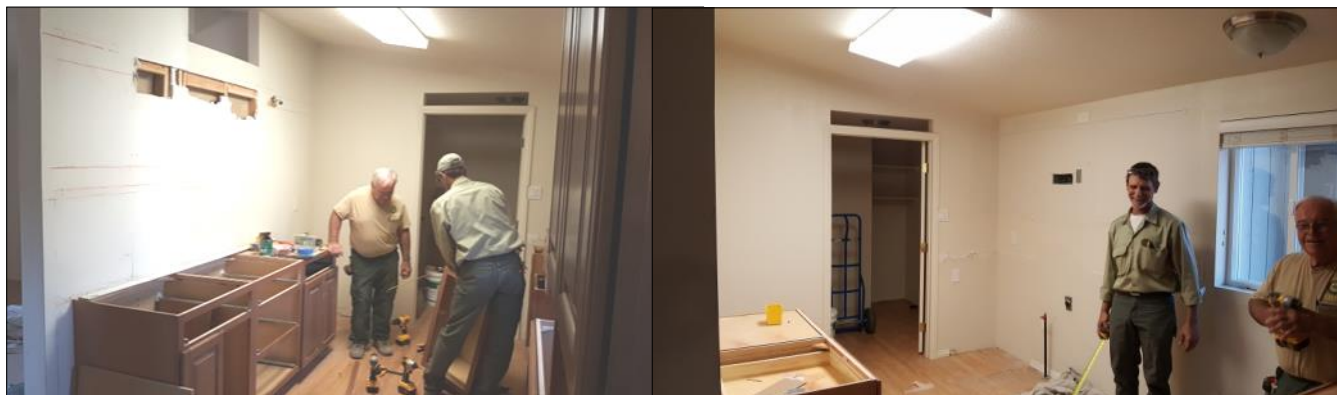


The second half of the building now in place next to the first section.

The crew returned the following week to “marry” the two parts together and seal the roofing, sides and flooring to make it weather-tight. The next steps will be installing all of the utilities, building the deck and shade ramada, followed by the accessible ramp and sidewalk. This will be done by in-house staff and will also include some slight modernizing on the interior as well. (Say good-bye to the 70's-styled wood paneling.) More pics to follow as the project moves along. Stay tuned!

OW Maintenance News

By Alfredo Jacobo, Park Maintenance Supervisor



Malcom Lambert and Randy Andrews, both Senior Maintenance Aides, are working on the installation of the new kitchen cabinets in District residence #3.



Corey Ingersoll, PMW II, worked on the sewer and water line of the new residence on the Toner property

Heber Dunes Happenings

By Jaime Mendez, State Park Interpreter I

Oh the places they've been!

Heber Dunes has a long-standing reputation for being the place for party animals to go. This is especially so if you are a symbolic monarch butterfly looking for a good time! Your bon voyage party finds you clustering on the palm trees outside the park office right around El Dia de los Muertos with bags packed and ready for your annual Mexican holiday. Cinco de Mayo finds you back in El Centro sharing your selfies with enthralled Afterschool Junior Rangers.

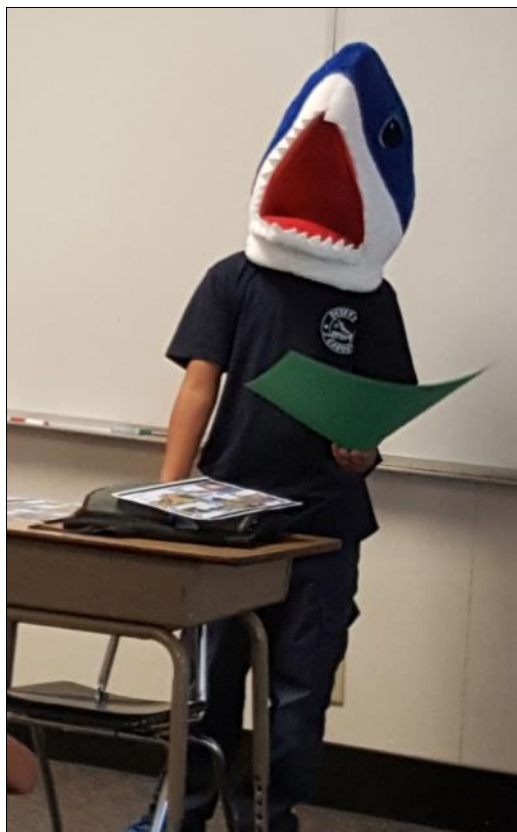
Then there's Harvey Hare who can be found holding court at the Park's fire pit for the day's "Eggstravaganza" activities. Willie Worm and Lillie Ladybug take over for the annual Children's Day event at Bucklin Park.



Not to be forgotten are Rodney the Rattlesnake, Clark the Shark, and all those creatures that go thump in the night who helped kick off a new school season of Afterschool Junior Ranger activities. Laissez les bon temps rouler!

Oh the places we'll go!

While the critters were having a good time, somebody had to keep things going back at the Park and at the Heber Fall Festival and Car Show. Those somebodies



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Heber Dunes Happenings *continued...*

included volunteer helpers with the McKinley ASES garden project, a new park interpretive specialist learning the ropes, and Heber's hard working Maintenance crew. There was not a lot of time for selfies, but Sector Superintendent Kent Miller did treat the hard-working staff of Heber Dunes to a field trip to San Jacinto State Park. A great way to ease from summer into fall.

Discovering Heber Dunes was the preferred holiday alternative activity for twenty-eight 3rd Sunday Hikers in November. In early December, thirty-six CoDIGO and Sin Frontera volunteers joined hands and spokes for a new community service project—adopting the Heber/Calexico section of Hwy 7. To celebrate this new adventure a BBQ and impromptu horseshoe tournament followed at Heber Dunes' group area. Dune discoveries continued to pop up through out the park as winter break welcomed back eleven young and enthusiastic hikers/sand surfers from NAF El Centro's Youth Program. As the sun set on 2017 you could almost hear the wind whisper thru the Dunes—"What a fun place to go!"



Meet Justin ...

Hello OHV family. My name is Justin Perna. I grew up in San Diego, in the La Mesa and Lakeside area. I attended Helix High School and then San Diego Christian College, where I majored in biology, and was captain of the soccer team my senior year. After college I worked in a medical diagnostic lab and played two years of minor league soccer in Boston, in the American Soccer League, and then in Orange County in the United Premier Soccer League. After my playing career ended, my wife Melissa and I purchased a family member's home and some land in Borrego Springs. I was blessed enough to get hired this past July as a Senior Park Aide for the Resources Department here in Ocotillo Wells, and it's been an absolute joy ever since.



Springtime Celebrations Round Out Season

By Jan Naragon, Senior Park Aide, Interpretation & Education

How can you hope to top a flower bloom like the one in spring of 2017? Many families powered on past the flowers to revel in the changes created by warmer, longer days and comfortable evenings. During the last few Saturday evenings in March and April, OW visitors were invited to Nights Out at Ocotillo Wells. Each evening provided a kaleidoscope of all our previous nighttime interpretive programs—Breathtaking Bats, Stargazing, and Scorpion Hunts. This no-excuses series included indoor games of Spring-go—a version of bingo fashioned around a springtime variety of nature’s offerings in the park. Participants of all ages roamed between events, won “valuable” prizes, and enjoyed refreshments, all within striking distance of the Discovery Center. No wind, rain, or heat could prevent fun from being had on these action-packed evenings.



The official interpretive season ended on April 16 with our annual Eggs-travaganza and Egg Hunt at the Harold Soens Training Track, complete with egg-educational activities and games featuring our two rabbit neighbors, Desert Cottontail (*Sylvilagus audubonii*) and Black-tailed Jackrabbit (*Lepus californicus*). Parents enjoyed a caffeine kickstart before two waves of egg hunters braved



the heat and the hay bales to look for treats and for golden eggs that led to special prizes. A third species of rabbit, Erasmus

Bunnyologist, was reportedly spotted in the vicinity doing a little networking with our younger visitors. Families and friends bade their farewells at the barbecue, and hatched plots for the next riding season.

An egg-cellent time was had by all!



Ocotillo Wells Interpretive Staff Reaches Out...

By Sharon Weil, State Park Interpreter I

...to Off-Road Enthusiasts

Fall marks the unofficial start of the off-road desert riding season. Many enthusiasts attend the numerous shows and expos in the area that feature the latest and greatest in off-road recreation vehicles, safety gear, equipment and parts. The Ocotillo Wells Interpretation Department attended the Hot August Nights off-road show on August 5 in Temecula, the Orange County Sand Sport Super Show September 15-17 in Costa Mesa, and the Lucas Oil Off-Road Expo September 30 and October 1 in Pomona. Staff interacted with more than 7,150 attendees during those six show days.

Staff fielded questions about the type of riding Ocotillo Wells has to offer, destination information, park rules and regulations, and general camping requirements. Attendees were thrilled to receive the new Visitor Guide that they could take away in order to read more about what Ocotillo Wells has to offer.

As in the past, the Gnarly Beasts of the Past exhibit, showcasing stories of the ancient animals who roamed the Borrego Valley, was wildly popular. This year's star of the show was the short-faced bear. What off-road enthusiast would not love the story of the biggest bear that ever roamed the earth—capable of running 40 mph and tall as a 6-foot man? As visitors moved through “time,” they were able to look closely at the skulls and skins of modern-day animals that call Ocotillo Wells home, including coyote, bobcat and badger. Everyone loved being able to touch a real animal pelt and see what animals' skulls looked like.



During the Sand Sport Super Show in Orange County, interpreters also talked to children about desert animals and their special adaptations that help them survive in the harsh environment. With colored pencils and paper in hand, kids were encouraged to sit down and create their own “mystery” beasts, each with at least two special creative adaptations that they made up. The creativity was amazing! There were critters that had umbrellas for tails to keep them shaded and cool, catcher's mitts for paws to help them catch more food, and special x-ray vision glasses to help them hunt during cooler nights.

Visitors to the shows loved to be able to take away park maps, resource guides, and trading cards to help them research the park and plan their upcoming visits. In addition, all of the shows were awesome opportunities to reach out to the off-road community to promote safe riding, Tread Lightly principles, and the exploration of their state parks.

Follow Ocotillo Wells SVRA on Facebook!



Find updates on changes in the park, historic and modern park photos, reminders about policies and regulations, and the schedule for our various interpretive programs. What a great forum for visitors to communicate and connect.

Check it out and “Like” us...because, after all, we like you.

www.facebook.com/OcotilloWellsSVRA



Events at Ocotillo Wells

Kids Adventure Connection!
Geology Daze! Geology Festival
Hot Stars & Heavenly Bodies Astronomy Festival
Bug-a-Palooza Bug Festival
Eggs-travaganza
Hot Desert Nights

January 13-14, 2018
February 17-19, 2018
March 17, 2018
March 24-25, 2018
March 31, 2018
April 7, 2018



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